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Youth and Recreation Branch
Ontario Department of Education

Community sports councils

In many Ontario communities, sports programs contribute vitally to the quality of life. People of all ages and many different backgrounds find suitable physical recreation activities scheduled to coincide with their leisure hours and their special interests — whether they are looking for a regular fitness program, an occasional game of golf, beginners' classes in curling, or the chance to train for competitive swimming or track-and-field events.

Programs of minor team-sports for boys still tend to take the center of the stage in smaller Ontario communities, but well-balanced programs designed for wide participation are now often recognized as a community objective.

Whether people have opportunities to take part in sports just for fun and to make friends, or to improve their skills and try for higher levels of competence, sports programs add variety and interest to life in the community.

Organizing programs, co-ordinating all the activities and initiating new sports to stimulate interest are all part of the job of providing a community sports program. Those who have programs to offer need means of communicating with the authorities and agencies who control facilities and recreation areas in the community, as well as with those who would like to participate. A community sports council may be set up to help all these people who have a common interest in sport to co-ordinate their efforts to reach the goal of improving community sports programs and providing more opportunities for everyone, young and old, to enjoy active games.

Why a sports council?

The recreation staff in many Ontario communities maintains a central registry of sports groups and co-ordinates programs so that the greatest number of people will be able to participate. In some communities the recreation staff uses a sports council so that representatives of the various groups may share the decision-making.

Where sports councils are set up by the recreation staff, or where they operate in communities without a recreation staff, they can

- establish codes of ethics supported by the coaches, officials and participants of the sports groups who are represented on the council;
- co-ordinate the use of facilities and recreation areas in the community;
- provide liaison between the school's physical education and sports programs and related community-based programs;
- establish a reasonable framework of goals, policies and procedures for the minor sports leagues — guidelines to ensure the involvement of parents and the best interests of all the community's children;
- assist in fund-raising for needed community programs and facilities;
- serve as local sponsors for sports demonstrations and coaches' or officials' clinics and seminars;
- create, publish and purchase materials and aids for coaches and officials to use;
- recommend to the recreation authority and others the modifications and changes needed in existing sports equipment and facilities to ensure the safety of participants and spectators;
- provide the administrative services of accounting, duplicating, secretarial assistance and mailing to the member groups of the council.

How to form a council

In a community where no recreation staff is employed, a local survey of sports groups and sports resources, followed by a community conference may be the prelude to the establishment of a sports council. Bulletin 13 in this series provides some guidelines for planning a community conference. The Youth and Recreation Consultants in the Department's regional offices are useful in identifying sources of assistance when a community survey is called for.

A community sports council may serve in an area as large as a major city or as small as a borough, town or village. It may serve a single municipal recreation authority and there may also be joint councils where the sports programs of two or more municipalities are co-ordinated.

Every community has citizens and organizations who are especially enthusiastic about sports programs. They find coaches for the minor hockey league. They run the lawn bowling tournaments. They organize track and field meets. These people at the local level know what programs and resources exist, where improvements can be made, what groups will want to be included.

Purposes

All the possible responsibilities and relationships of a sports council should be carefully considered by the community groups or recreation authority setting it up.

- How should the sports council function to ensure leisure sports programs for the whole community?
- If the community has an established recreation staff, the sports council should be an advisory group. To whom should its recommendations be made? What should be the areas of its competence?
- If the community has no recreation staff, the volunteer council might be the responsible agency co-ordinating and administering the community's programs.
- A joint sports council set up by neighboring communities would have different responsibilities than the council serving a single community.

Possible special projects

1

Marshalling community resources by means of a survey and evaluation of sports programs and facilities.

2

Staging games encompassing a number of sports and declaring community champions. This concept at the provincial level inspires the Ontario summer and winter games and, at the national level, the Canada games.

3

Offering a community fitness program in which people can become involved on a regular basis.

4

Organizing and operating community sport days when the athletes taking part have opportunities to display their level of achievement to the public.

5

Organizing fitness projects such as the "swimathon" and the "walkathon", varied in type and intensity of activity in order to interest and involve a larger number of people.

Membership

All the sports groups of the community should be represented on the council. The agencies providing sports programs or controlling facilities should also be included. Care should be taken to ensure that all segments of the population have spokesmen — all age groups, both sexes, in-school youngsters, drop-outs, working youth, young adults, couples, older people — all groups that can enjoy and benefit from sports activities.

A few of the groups to be represented are:

- Each sport played in the community
- The board of education
- The municipal recreation committee or recreation department
- Churches sponsoring sports activities
- Service clubs sponsoring sports activities
- Local branches of the YMCA, YWCA, YMHA
- The business community
- Regional sports council, if one exists

Valuable resource people would include the regional Youth and Recreation consultant, a local physician to advise on safety measures, as well as sports editors and reporters of the local papers, TV and radio.

Internal structure

To carry out the plans and projects of the sports council, an executive committee will be needed sooner or later. The offices would include president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and a chairman for each sub-committee.

Standing committees for the constitution, finance, membership, and eligibility may also be needed. As the council becomes more involved with community projects, specil short term committees may be required.